



# RESERVATION EMPIRE :

## THE MISSION INDIAN FEDERATION AND NATIVE AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

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Smethan, Tibeto, Residence  
Riverside, California

Indian Federation Convention

Photo by Aunt Emma Jones  
Oct 1900

These orders were given by him under the theory that the Indians were a self governing (sic) body and that they had the authority of such officers to use force and arms if necessary to make their authority recognized.

-THOMAS L. SLOAN, 1927

These are the so-called captains of the Mission Indian Federation. All of them are captains of reservations that do not exist, never did exist, but anyway it is promised to them that they will get the reservation and be the rulers supreme, an empire of their own.

-WINSLOW COURO, 1938

If the treaties had been carried out, the Indians would have been educated as the white children were, and many of them would now be educated doctors, lawyers, and professional men instead of poor beggars in the hills.

-Adam Castillo, 1932

1919

**RESERVATION INDIANS FORM 'CONFEDERATION' AND DEFY AUTHORITIES**

...the Mission Indian Federation... the Indians... the federal Indian Bureau... the Mission Indian Federation... the Indians... the federal Indian Bureau...

**INDIANS WITHDRAW FROM FEDERATION.**

**YOUNGER MEN FAIL TO AGREE WITH FATHERS AS TO POLICY OF ORGANIZATION.**

LOCAL CORRESPONDENCE, RIVERSIDE, Feb. 2.—The next meeting of the newly-organized Mission Indian Federation, expected here last night by the older tribal Indians, is scheduled for March 1, but its deliberations will not be participated in by the younger generation, who withdrew from the con-

1934

**COMMUNIST PROGRAM LAID TO INDIAN COMMISSIONER**

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29. (AP) "gram" had brought upon her Alice Lee Jensen of the Ameri... an Indian Federation today said... Mrs. Jensen directed Col... Indian Commissioner John Col... her's attention to the reported... er is conducting a Communist... Montclair—at Elbowoods, N.D... gram among the nation's roc... She said the movement is to be...

**TRIBES ASK CONGRESS TO LET INDIANS ALONE**

**Federation in Idaho Attacks Moves to 'Help' Them and Criticize Collier**

LEWISTON, Idaho, July 31 (AP)—The American Indian Federation asked Congress today to let the Indians run their own affairs.

1950

**Indians Seek State Rights**

**Mission Federation at San Diego Asks Backing of Citizenship Bill**

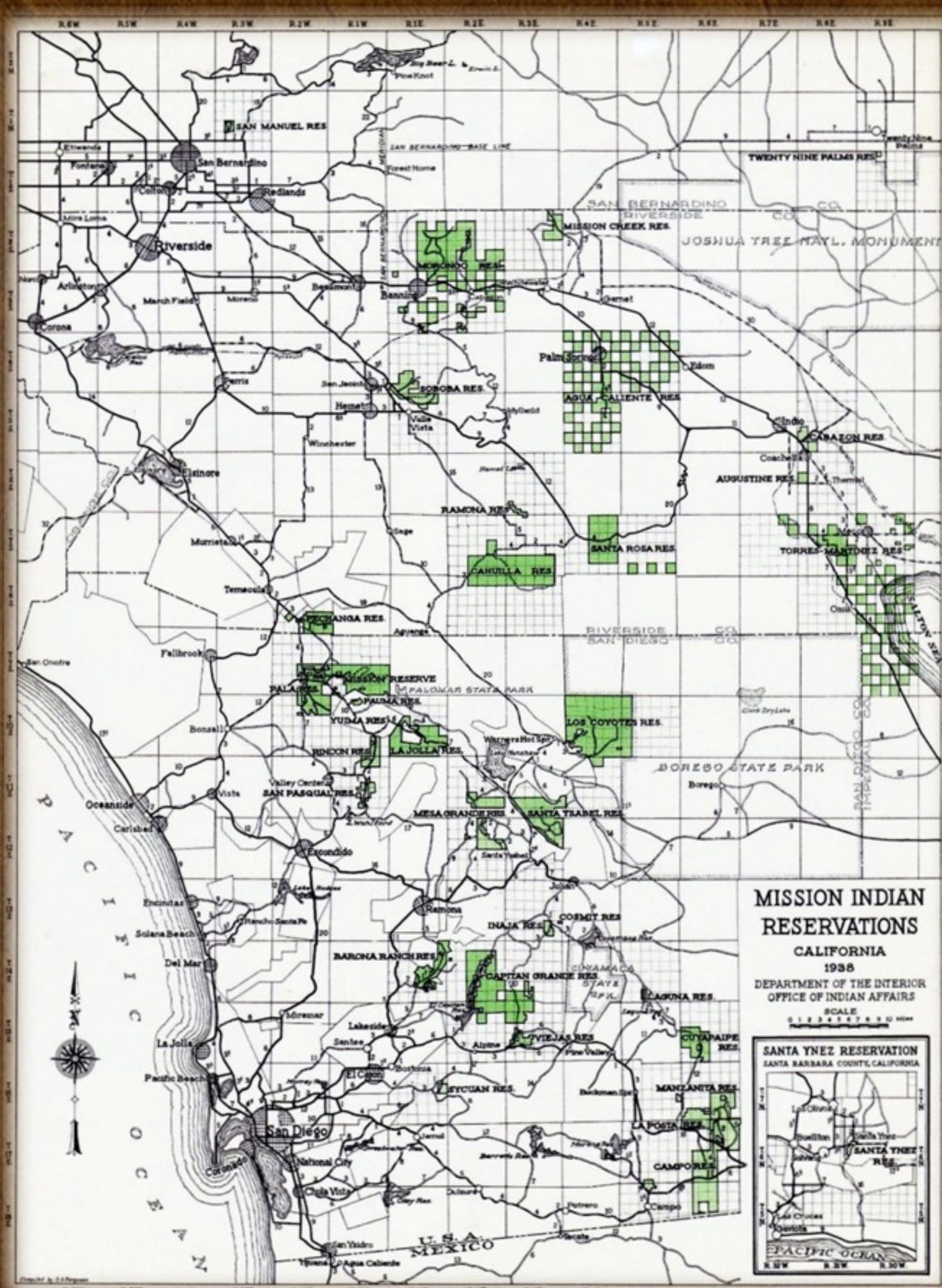
SAN DIEGO, Oct. 25. (AP)—California Indians wish to be placed under the same police, education and welfare control as other citizens of the State, the Mission Indian Federation, meeting in con-

**Indians to Seek GOP Help on Land Claims**

**Juaneno Tribe Spokesman Will Attempt to Insert Plank in Republican Platform**

BY MILT BROUHARD  
SAN JUAN CAPIS, was once the home of the FRANKO-California Indians, frontiersmen, fighting a disputed... Lobo said he would make government land claims and every effort to join his fellow Indians, will seek to enter a California Indians in some...

1970s



In 1934, the traditional tribal leaders of Southern California met in Riverside to unify the thirty scattered reservations of their homeland. They formalized their sovereignty with the Mission Indian Federation (MIF), rejecting increased federal dominance and interference. From the start, they rallied to Carlos Montezuma's call to disband the federal Indian Bureau.

The Federation supported continued control of reservation lands and resources by traditional leaders. The stance divided communities from the beginning as many young people left the organization after its founding.

The MIF vigorously opposed the policy of allotment in the 1920s, which would have removed traditional, centralized control of reservations. Forced evictions from reservations by the MIF police force speak to the centrality of control within Federation politics.

When Franklin Roosevelt's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, announced his intention to reform the Indian Bureau instead of eliminate it as he had promised, the MIF decided to go national. Joined by tribal people from throughout the United States, they formed the American Indian Federation in 1934.

The American Indian Federation vigorously opposed Collier's efforts to tribalize reservations and create democratic governments under the Indian Bureau. Federationists lobbed charges of communist infiltration at the Bureau in congressional hearings. This caught the attention of critics of the Roosevelt Administration, most notably groups on the far right. As a result of internal conflicts and flirtations with Nazi-aligned groups such as the *German-American Bund*, the MIF withdrew from the national within two years of its founding, greatly hampering opposition to the Bureau.

Following the Second World War, the Federation shifted its focus to the California Indian Claims Case and to the budding policy of tribal termination. The Claims Case sought remuneration for lands stolen from California Indians by settlers and the government. While the cases eventually brought a pair of settlements, the payouts to California Indians were insignificant.

Appealing to the conservative post-war drive to reduce the size of the federal government, the Federation lobbied to free its members from wardship through termination. The policy of termination quickly lost favor in the region, however, as it meant widespread disenfranchisement for most tribal members. It promised a large payoff for those who controlled reservation lands and assets, however. Thus, the Mission Indian Federation lost favor and faded in the 1970s.

